

JUN 28 1992

A Presidential Commission created by Congress to provide bipartisan oversight of the international broadcasting, information, and educational exchange activities of the United States government

TOM C. KOBOLCZOS  
Chairman  
WILLIAM J. WYBL  
Vice Chairman  
EDWIN J. FEINER, JR.  
LEWIS W. DOUGLAS, JR.  
WALTER R. ROBERTS  
PAMELA J. TURNER

UNITED STATES ADVISORY COMMISSION ON

# PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

## THE NEW WORLD OF U.S. INTERNATIONAL BROADCASTING — TELEVISION

### What's New

- *Television is the primary source of news and information worldwide in countries where it is available.*
- *The U.S. Information Agency's Worldnet television service has become the world's foremost international teleconferencing network.*
- *As the forerunner in international television, CNN has inspired many competitors and helped define Worldnet's niche as a narrowcaster.*
- *Worldnet's global network of dish antennas has grown from 5 in 1985 to 278 today.*
- *The Voice of America and USIA's press service Wireless File are carried on Worldnet satellites at little additional cost.*

There are about 1.1 billion television sets in the world, and television is now the primary source of news and information in countries where it is available. It is shaping the course of history and the conduct of diplomacy, and governments are struggling to determine how best to utilize this powerful medium.

Using satellite technology, USIA's Worldnet has since the mid-1980s become the world's premier international teleconferencing service. It is capable of up to 500 video meetings a year, linking studios in Washington with television dish antennas around the world.

### What Should Be Done

- *Develop Worldnet's regional, satellite-fed syndication service of programs in local languages suitable for placement on TV stations abroad.*
- *Increase the television share in the U.S. international broadcasting budget, now 17 to 1 in favor of radio.*
- *Combine the talent in VOA's language and news divisions with the talent in Worldnet to produce attractive television programs.*
- *Increase market and audience research to make Worldnet's programs more competitive.*
- *Terminate TV Marti.*
- *Eliminate regulatory barriers to reserving time on future satellites and long-term satellite leasing.*

Such meetings are called interactives, because they bring U.S. experts or newsmakers into dialogue with colleagues and journalists abroad. They can resemble a seminar, a press conference or a call-in show.

Because Worldnet's transmissions address selected audiences, it can be called a narrowcaster, to distinguish its programming from commercial broadcast television.

Worldnet must go through "gatekeepers," USIA posts in most instances, and it is beginning to realize its potential as a direct program service to foreign broadcasters.

COMPLETED

JULY

1992



## Worldnet Interactives

Teleconferencing is flexible. Many newsworthy interactives get not only prime time television placement abroad but spinoff coverage in print media. When Secretary of State James Baker, David Rockefeller, and former Chief Justice Warren Burger were interviewed on Worldnet interactives in a one-month period this spring, media coverage in participating countries was extensive.

Many interactives don't make news, at least the hard news of a breaking story the mass media would cover. They are, nonetheless, useful public diplomacy tools. Countermarcotics experts or museum curators coming together via Worldnet to discuss mutual concerns can effectively support U.S. interests.

Worldnet's global network at USIA's posts has grown from 5 dishes in 1985 to 278 today. Worldnet also is donating dishes to TV stations in emerging democracies to allow them to receive its signal directly.

Before dishes were available, USIA's TV productions reached the field by diplomatic pouch or through elaborate and expensive electronic juryrigs. For example, in 1985 it cost \$2,000 to set up temporary microwave links between the Mexican government's earth station and the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City every time an interactive news conference could be scheduled.

Now with the Embassy's own dish and studios, interactives are commonplace and USIA pays the transmission overhead of about \$7 an hour. The cost of the dish has long since been amortized.

## Cable News Network

On the news front, a major international broadcaster, CNN, has emerged. While international radio dates to the 1930s, television broadcasting across frontiers is a phenomenon of the 1980s.

In less than six years, CNN has become the first truly international television network, raising massive funds for expansion and riding a wave of international TV deregulation. It is now seen in 93 countries.

## International TV's World

When programs are put on satellites in stationary orbits some 22,750 miles up, their transmission "footprints," often thousands of miles wide, ignore international frontiers. A national satellite like Indonesia's Palapa,

launched to meet one country's needs, can transmit over a much larger area. With the addition of private telecommunications satellites, pioneered in 1988, regulatory and coordinating mechanisms are often bypassed and must struggle to keep up with developments.

While most satellite transmitted programming is intended for rebroadcast or cable, shadow audiences of millions with dish antennas in rich and poor nations alike can capture TV signals and increasingly are being wooed. A sampling of broadcasters provides an idea of how fiercely competitive the international TV environment has become.

BBC World Service Television began broadcasting news to Europe in 1991 and plans to target every continent by 1993. With service in English and Mandarin, it has one of five channels on Hong Kong-based HutchVision, which offers a full commercial range of movies, entertainment, sports and news to countries in the huge footprint of the AsiaSat I satellite in East and South Asia.

The British government, which funds BBC World Service radio, but not its television, has begun producing and sending programs abroad via Worldwide Television News (WTN), an Anglo-Australian-American news and program syndicator.

Skynews has made a 24-hour news channel available to subscribers. It is only one of 80 satellite-borne channels available in Europe. Astra, the Luxembourg-based network of Pan European Broadcasting, had 31 channels by March 1991.

Turkish National Radio and Television (TRT) is reported to have put \$20 million into a crash program to broadcast 468 hours a week to audiences ranging from Turkish "guest workers" in Europe to the Muslim Central Asian states of the former Soviet Union.

Egyptian government TV has a satellite channel beamed throughout the Arabic-speaking world. Its number one standing among international satellite broadcasters in this market is being challenged by Middle East Broadcasting Centre (MBC), owned privately by Saudis with royal connections. From studios in London, MBC targets an estimated five million Arabs in Europe and 100 million in the Arab world. It is rebroadcast by stations in Kuwait and Bahrain and is pushing hard for reception on millions of privately owned dishes.

Germany's Deutsche Welle is adding a



global TV service, negotiating with USIA to trade satellite time in Europe for underused Worldnet capacity in other parts of the world.

There are many more broadcasters and even more aspirants, government and private.

## Technology

Much of the technology Worldnet will use in the future already exists.

While Direct Broadcasting by Satellite (DBS) to home receivers is the dreamed-of future of international radio, it is here now for television. Without radio's need for CD quality sound and portable receivers, television can be sent from broadcaster to audience via satellite, provided the audience is willing to spend what it takes for a dish antenna.

The Commission believes it speaks volumes about the power of television that even in the developing world viewers will pay a great deal to receive TV by satellite, singly or in a co-op. Analysts assume the cost of a DBS radio receiver must break the \$50 barrier to be commercially viable.

The Ivory Coast already reports an overabundance of dish sellers and maintainers. In the big cities of India, "dish wallahs" are selling to apartment blocks where, for a hookup fee of about \$24 and \$4 a month for service, international as well as national programs are brought from space to crowded rooftops.

Worldnet can be expected to conduct two-way video dialogues. Today, they are one-way video from Washington to the field, with the audio both ways. Elsewhere, two-way video teleconferences are in daily use already, witness recent developments in U.S. electoral politics.

Worldnet awaits advances in digital compression technology, crowding more signals into already paid-for satellite time, to take advantage of an innovation that has far-reaching implications for other USIA activities as well.

Two-to-one video compression technology has been demonstrated recently, giving twice the program carrying capacity within the same spectrum. Three-to-one compression may come on stream as early as next year, the point at which real benefits would accrue for Worldnet.

## Worldnet's Potential

The future lies in developing Worldnet's potential beyond its current leading role in teleconferencing to the production of broad-

cast-quality programs — programs that are available in language versions, have a regional or single country focus, and are produced by professionals with media and area expertise.

The goal is to produce programs that will appeal to stations abroad. The delivery system still would be via satellite to dishes, at USIA posts and at local TV stations. This would leave Worldnet technically out of broadcasting *per se*. But there is a valuable niche for Worldnet as a syndicator of programs on themes important to the broad range of America's worldwide public diplomacy initiatives.

Much of the immense potency of television lies in its ability to tell what the news means. VOA's writers produce radio scripts, for example, that give thoughtful, well researched American perspectives on important news and issues. It is excellent radio. Some of it could become excellent television with a different alignment of resources between USIA radio and television.

The language abilities and area expertise of VOA's regional broadcasters are a national asset. It should be possible for USIA's Bureau of Broadcasting, home of VOA and Worldnet, to use their talents for television programming. In the Commission's view, the most productive future for Worldnet lies in this direction.

There are markets in important parts of the world for broadcast-quality television programs about the United States.

Commission members and U.S. broadcasting officials recently returned from Central Asian states in the former USSR report there is a large and eager market for information about America, especially about popular culture and the multiple faces of modernization, American style.

Comparable television opportunities exist throughout the developing world. The dishes are already in place and local television is burgeoning.

## Future Considerations

**Change the radio/television mix.** Worldnet's potential will not be realized as long as U.S. government priorities permit 17 dollars to be spent on radio for every dollar spent on television.

Part of this expense goes into keeping about half the U.S. government's worldwide array of some 180 international shortwave radio transmitters focused on Eastern





United States  
Advisory Commission  
on Public Diplomacy

101 4th Street, S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20547  
202 619-4457

Bruce Gregory  
Staff Director  
James Dickinson  
Deputy Staff Director

Europe and western areas of the former Soviet Union. This made sense when the Warsaw Pact was a military threat, and shortwave radio was the decisive means of communicating with audiences in this part of the world. It is still essential for the U.S. to communicate with these audiences, but radio, while important, has become one means among many.

**Regulatory reform.** USIA faces regulatory impediments to reserving time on prospective satellite delivery systems; to leasing satellite time for periods longer than five years; and to contracting without an unusually cumbersome bidding process for computer-related technology, a category broad enough to include all satellite services. Millions could be saved by relaxing or removing these impediments. USIA should seek to do so, sharpening its competitive edge in the process.

**Terminate TV Marti.** Added savings would come from closing down TV Marti, USIA's pre-dawn broadcasts to Cuba for which sizable expenditures have produced only a trace audience. Unlike Radio Marti, which has an important Cuban audience, TV Marti is not cost-effective, and its resources

should be directed to more productive broadcasting initiatives.

**Who is watching and why?** Putting a signal on a satellite is only part of what international television is about. The technology exists now, and much is being used. The bottom line for American interests is whether someone is watching.

The future lies in program development, in marketing, and in audience research. For U.S. government international television to be successful, it will need high quality programs; effective marketing strategies; and more information on media habits, audience preferences, proliferating local and international competitors, and the impact of new technologies.

All this requires a greater investment than the United States so far has been willing to make. The power of the medium, its proven value in reaching audiences important to U.S. interests, and unprecedented ground floor opportunities in many countries, opportunities that will not last, call for policymakers and Congress to make international television a much higher priority.

In the Commission's judgment it is an investment worth making.

#### FUNDS AVAILABLE FOR U.S. GOVERNMENT INTERNATIONAL RADIO AND TELEVISION BROADCASTING IN 1992\*

(In millions)



\* Funds for U.S. Government Broadcasting: FY 1992 totaled \$805 million. Amounts reflect FY 1992 appropriations plus carryover balances.

\*\* \*\* = ratio of radio to television is \$760 million to \$46 million - or 17 to 1.